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House of Double Axes

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House of Double Axes

Rachel Wright

A whorehouse is never quiet. It is never clean and a putrid stench hangs in the dead air. No woman working in a place like this gets used to it.

But as Maria Ruiz teetered on the back stairway in the House of Double Axes, her home since she ran away at fifteen, she did not hear the ceaseless moans, thuds, and screams permeating the old walls. She did not feel dirt caked under her bare feet or layers of oily grime on the handrail. She did not smell that repulsive stench.

Fall! She silently urged. Just fall!

She did not fall. She clutched her belly where an abomination grew inside. How could God grant life to such filthy circumstances! He had abandoned her long ago. The Virgin Mary would be callous to her condition as well. Had her Catholic schooling not failed Maria so miserably, perhaps she would look to Saint Mary of Egypt for guidance, the Patron Saint of Prostitutes. But she didn't know. She was completely alone, threatening to bring an innocent baby into this ugly world. Fall, fall, fall! Mercy, she assured her baby, this is mercy, something never granted to her, and should she die from the fall as well and burn in Hell for her deed, all the better.

But she could not make herself fall.

Downstairs, Papi yelled she had a gentleman coming. Gentleman!

Behind her, a man who had visited her a few times, a man who may have fathered this tragedy, touched her back with cold fingertips and whispered, "Need a push?"